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CHAUDHARY MOHAMMAD YASIN KHAN - SOCIAL REFORMER OF THE MEWATIS

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I

- 1.0 Mewat is situated south of Delhi covering approximately the modern districts of Mathura, Alwar, Gurgaon and Bharatpur.¹ A considerable population of the people inhabiting this region is called 'Meos'. The word Mewati is used for the Meos by the people living outside Mewat. Most of the areas of Mewat are surrounded by the Arawali ranges. The inhabitants of this region in addition to Meos consist of Jats, Goojars, Ahirs, Meenas, Rajputs, Brahmanas, Mahajans, Harijans etc. A large number of Meos migrated to Pakistan in 1947 and many refugees from Panjab and Sindh came to this region and settle here.²
- 1.1 By nature Mewatis are brave hard working, war like people representing the Rajput characteristics from which they also claim their origin.³ Being in the close proximity of Delhi, they had to suffer the atrocities and plunder of invaders in the past. How and when a large number of them embraced Islam is shrouded in legends. It is however noteworthy that the Mewatis resisted all invaders. Hasan Khan Mewati's fight against the Mughals is too well known. In the First War of Independence, 1857, the Mewatis extended their full support to the rebels, fought against the British Raj and as a consequence they had to suffer death, torture, confiscation of properties and humiliation.⁴

II

- 2.1 This brave community has produced a number of great persons. One of them was Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan. He was born on November 4, 1986 in village

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Rehna of district Gurgaon.⁵ His father Chaudhary Khuda Baksh Khan died in his childhood and the responsibility of his early education fell upon his mother. His uncle Chaudhary Wali Mohammad gave special care to his education and character building.⁶ Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan was an intelligent and hard working student, passed his middle class examination from Nuh Middle School and stood first throughout Panjab. He passed B.A. examination from the Mission College Delhi and became the first graduate of Mewat. He began his career as a Cooperative Inspector in Mewat but on the advice of his uncle he left the service and went to Aligarh to pursue education in Law. Due to some reasons he abandoned his studies at Aligarh and went to Delhi University from where he obtained his degree in Law.⁷

- 2.2 His teacher Munshi Nasib Ahmad, Principal of the Mission College F.S.C. Adison and Maulvi Fazaluddin had greatly inspired him for human welfare and national service.⁸ For the upliftment of the Mewatis Chaudhary Yasin Khan took inspiration from Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and was determined to spread modern education among Mewatis through modern educational institutions. He began to work in that direction despite all difficulties specially financial and opposition from conservative orthodoxy of the Meos. He began his work by starting school at Rehna. Like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan he also believed that only education could reform the society of the Meos which suffered from inequality, disharmony and quarrels.⁹
- 2.3 He shifted his school to Nuh. He summoned a *Panchayat* of the community and it was decided in it to establish a High School. He presented the whole scheme of the community would pay eight rupees for this purpose.¹⁰ Deputy Commissioner of the Gurgaon F.L. Brayne agreed to collect two annas per bigha with the revenue for the maintenance of the school.¹¹ Sir Fazal Husian, Education Minister of Panjab, laid the foundation stone of the school by merging the Middle School Nuh and Middle School of Zilla Parishad, on 28 March, 1923. Thereafter the school, was renamed as Brayne Meo High School.¹² Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan was made Chairman of the District Board, Gurgaon. He made a plan of establishing a Primary School after every two miles, and a Middle School after every two villages (if the population justified it).¹³
- 2.4 Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan by the time had attained considerable reputation not only within his community but in the region itself. In view of his public image and following, he was elected a member of the Panjab Assembly from 1926-1946 on the ticket of the, Unionist Party.¹⁴ In 1947 he became a member of the Congress Party and continued to hold his position as a member of the Panjab Assembly from 1952-1962.¹⁵ He was one of the great supporters of Sir Chhotu Ram. Both were keen to ensure that the peasantry is relieved from the traditional hardship, inflicted upon it by the *zamindars*. The two leaders had different religious outlooks. Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan was a true follower of Islam and Sir Chhotu Ram was an Arya Samjist. But both fought for the common cause of the peasants and against their exploitation by the money lenders.¹⁶

III

- 3.1 Around the 1930-1931 Maharaja of Alwar, Sawai Jai Singh, increased the land revenue and other taxes. It was a great burden on peasants and they were unable to pay. Most of the peasants were Mewatis. They showed resentment and decided not to pay taxes and revenues if they were not reduced. Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan supported their demand and led them in this struggle. Soon the petty protest of the Mewatis took the shape of a movement known as 'Alwar Movement'. Maharaja tried hard to crush the movement. Having failed in this attempt, the entire movement was transformed into communal movement. Since the majority of the Mewatis were Muslims, the Alwar State termed it as Muslim movement against a Hindu state. Communal tensions led to the communal riots. At the instance of Maharaja, Muslims of Alwar had to abandon the city. They camped near Jama Masjid in Delhi and demanded central intervention. All the Mewatis supported the cause of the peasants of Alwar. Maharaja tried to bribe Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan secretly so as to break the unity of the Mewatis but he refused to oblige him.¹⁷ In the meantime the All India Meo Panchayat, earlier founded by Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan, called a conference at Ferozpur Jhirka popularly known as 'Alwar Conference'. The Conference decided to place the grievances of the peasants before the government and to raise the funds so as to carry on the work of Alwar Movement. Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan sought the guidance of Dr. Ziauddin Ahmad, the Vice-Chancellor of the Aligarh Muslim University. Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan also met the known Marxist-Nationalist Kunwar Mohammad Ashraf. To strengthen the movement Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan began to establish personal contacts with the people of Mewat and organised them highlighting the weaknesses of the Maharaja.¹⁸
- 3.2 The demands of the people were sent to the British Government and were also published and distributed among the people including national leaders of the Maharaja found considerable space in the national newspapers. A general atmosphere was created with the popular demand to cancel Maharajaship of Sawai Jai Singh. Maharaja attempted to get Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan murdered but he could not succeed in his object.¹⁹ Later on in the areas of Govindgarh, the army of Alwar State fired upon the Mewatis killing hundreds of them and injuring many. The Mewatis began to demand to deploy the British army so as to save them from Maharaja's atrocities. The British Government under the pressure of the Mewatis swung into action and the Maharaja was sent to France in exile where he died. The new Maharaja tried to bring peace but failed. So again an attempt was made to get Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan murdered. Luckily God saved his life.²⁰
- 3.3 The new Government of Alwar State could not afford a continuous peasant agitation of such a large scale. It finally conceded the demands and reduced 1/4 of the land revenue. Illegal taxes and *beggar* were also declared to be unlawful. Not only that but also the schools and Madarsas which were established during the movement were taken under the protection of Alwar Government. The people who had left their houses due to the enhancement of land revenue and other taxes

were rehabilitated.²¹ This was one of the great successes of Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan against the tyranny of a princely state.

IV

- 4.1 Alwar Movement greatly influenced the people of Bharatpur. Kishan Singh the Maharaja of Bharatpur decided not to take risk by disturbing the Mewatis. Batra, Diwan of the Bharatpur State accompanied with Chaudhary Azmat Khan and other Chaudharis came to Nuh and met Chaudhary Yasin Khan and assured him to give special attention to the upliftment of the Mewatis.²²
- 4.2 The Mewatis had to face the worst period in 1947 when the Congress and Muslim League accepted the partition of India. Communal riots broke out in Alwar, Bharatpur and the adjoining areas. Minor disputes between the Muslim Meos and the Non-Muslim could be easily converted to communal riots.²³ Unfortunately the situation was further aggravated by the indulgence of the Maharaja of Bharatpur who termed the Meos as rivals instead of subjects. It is alleged that he made every effort to overthrow the Meos from his territory. The forces of Bharatpur State fired upon the Mewatis and ousted them from the territory. It looted and burnt their villages. Towards the end July 1947 there was a large scale evacuation of Mewatis from Bharatpur State into Alwar State and Gurgaon district.²⁴
- 4.3 The plight of the Mewatis became worst when the Alwar State also followed the same policy. Murder, loot and plunder, forcible conversion of the Muslims became a general affair. Seventeen thousand Muslims became Hindu in Alwar and three thousand Muslims became Hindu in Bharatpur. However, they into Muslim fold by the effort of Maulana Ibrahim, Vinova Bhave, Satyam Bhai and Maulana Hifzur Rehman etc. Soon the same situation developed in the Jaipur State. Mewatis had to suffer due to the discriminatory policy of the state. According to an estimate about 3,00,000 Meos including ladies and children were killed in riots that took place in the State of Bharatpur, Alwar and Jaipur. Only in Alwar and Bharatpur districts around four thousand mosques were demolished. The whole area became a graveyard for the Muslims.²⁶

V

- 5.1 On 15 August, 1947, India, was divided and Pakistan came into existence. A large number of Hindus and Muslims were killed in the communal riots that followed the partition of India. The Mewatis had also to suffer greatly due to the communal frenzy. A large number of them began to migrate to Pakistan. But Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan firmly decided to dissuade the Mewatis from migration to Pakistan. In Sohna a transit camp had been organised by the Mewatis with a view to migrate to Pakistan. Muslim League agent led by Khan Bahadur were playing important role in discouraging the Meos to stay.²⁷ About 8 lakh Mewatis decided to leave for Pakistan. At that time Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan was holding meetings with Gandhiji and other leaders. His associates were trying to prevent the Mewatis from migration but they demanded only Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan's assurance. Chaudhary Sahib rushed to Sohna and succeeded in

preventing the Mewatis from migration assuring them protection and rehabilitation.²⁸

- 5.2 Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan was given a life threat and therefore for the few days he carried on his mission underground. Then a rumour spread that Chaudhary Sahib had migrated to Pakistan or was murdered. But he did not lose courage and resumed his mission openly. He led many processions for communal harmony and slogans of *Allah-o-Akbar* and *Bande Matram* were raised.²⁹ The Muslim League activists stoned him and propagated that Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan had left Islam and wanted to convert all the Mewatis into Hindu fold.³⁰ But he did not withdraw his steps and alongwith other Chaudharies published an article and distributed it in the whole of Mewat entitled "*Pakistan Ka Sabz Bagh Jhoota Hai*" (The illusion of Pakistan is untrue).³¹
- 5.3 Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan convinced Gandhiji to come and hold a programme at Ghasera in Gurgaon district in 19 December, 1947 to prevent the forcible emigration and to assure the rehabilitation of the Mewatis. Gopichand Bhargava, the East Panjab Premier, was also with Gandhiji.³² Gandhiji was very much against any type of migration. He declared, "— if he had an original power not a single Muslim should have found it necessary to migrate to Pakistan from Indian Union or a single Hindu or Sikh to leave his hearth and home in Pakistan and seek asylum in Indian Union." Referring to the Meo refugees who had been driven out from Alwar and Bharatpur State,³³ forward to the day when all enmities would be forgotten and all hatred buried underground and all those who have been driven away from their hearths and homes would return and resume their vocations in perfect security and peace as before. His heart would then dance with joy. He would never give up that hope ripe for it. He was sure that Union Government would not fail in discharging their duties in this respect and the States would have to listen to the advice of the Indian Government. He hoped that the Meos would not resent his advice but take it in the spirit in which it was offered. He also said, "Meos were the subject of Indian Union and it was its duty to help them with facilities of education and establishing settlements for them to settle in."³⁴
- 5.4 Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan toured the areas of Gurgaon, Alwar, Bharatpur and Mathura with the intention of rehabilitating the Mewatis. He alongwith Chaudharies demanded from the Government a restoration of the properties of the Mewatis (to which the Pakistan refugees had occupied). But the Government failed to fulfil their demands. Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan organised many public meetings to produce courage and enthusiasm in the Mewatis. it is quite interesting that when the news of rehabilitation and efforts of Chaudhary Sahib reached Pakistan, many migrated Mewatis returned to Mewat.³⁵ After few days Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan was arrested and remained behind the bars for 50 days. He was set free on the direct intervention of Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru.³⁶ Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan invited many national leaders like Acharya Vinoba Bhave, Lala Bhim Sen Sachar, Maulvi Abdul Ghani Dar, Kedar Nath Sehgal, Bahu Bachan Singh, Sardar Sajan Singh, Maulana Habibur Rahman Ludhianvi etc. In 1950, an Indian mission was sent to Pakistan

to maintain good relations between Pakistan and Indian Union. Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan was one of the leaders of the Mission.³⁷

VI

6.1 Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan died on 19 February, 1970. On 30 March, 1970, the Mewati community paid tribute to Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan at Nuh. The gathering comprised of one lakh Mewatis of India and Pakistan. The non-Mewatis were also present.³⁸

6.2 The Mewatis still remember him through narrative stories. A Mewati says:

"Raja Su Rani Kahe Tu Rehna Ko Jayo
Hun Mile Asin Tu Wake Paman Pad Jayo"

(The Queen asks the King to go to Rehna and requests him to bow his head on Yasin's feet in case he should find him there)

6.3 The Mewatis cherish him and they do not hesitate in saying "Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan holds exactly the same place in Mewat as Sura Yasin has in Holy Quran".

6.4 No doubt he was a great hero of the Mewatis, a true nationalist, a nation builder and a great patriot of India who not only civilised the rustic Mewatis but also brought many social and political changes.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Maulana Hakim Abdus Shakoor, *Tarikh Meo Chhatri*, Delhi, 1974. p.111, taken from Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1908. (Here after quoted as *Tarikh Meo Chhatri*)
2. Ibid. pp. 112-117
3. Hashim Amir Ali, *The Meos of Mewat*, new Delhi, 1970, p.18 (Here after quoted as the Meos of Mewat)
4. *Tarikh Meo Chhatri*, p.454.
5. Chaudhary Abdul Hai, *Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan : Jeevan Parichaya*, Delhi, p.3 (Here after quoted as Abdul Hai)
6. Ibid.
7. *Tarikh Meo Chhatri*, p.402.
8. Abdul Hai, p.3.
9. Interview with Chaudhary Tayyab Husain son of Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan and the President of the Governing Body Yasin Meo Degree College, Nuh and President of the All India Meo Panchayat.
10. *Tarikh Meo Chhatri*, p.402.
11. Interview with Master Abdus Salam, Secretary, Governing Body, Yasin Meo Degree College, Nuh.

12. *Tarikh Meo Chhatri*, p.402.
13. Ibid.
14. It was basically a zamindar Party which worked for the protection of peasants from Money lenders. This party flourished in the able leadership of Sir Chottu Ram, Fazal Husain and Chaudhary Yasin Khan.
15. *Tarikh Meo Chhatri*, p.403.
16. Interview with Hakim Ajmal Khan, a companion of Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Malik and a scholar of the history of the Meos.
17. *Tarikh Meo Chhatri*, p. 480, see also Abdul Hai, pp. 10-11.
18. *Tarikh Meo Chhatri*, pp. 480-481.
19. Ibid., p.482, see also Abdul Hai, p. 12.
20. Ibid.
21. *Tarikh Meo Chhatri*, p. 482.
22. Ibid., p. 484.
23. The Meos of Mewat, p.170, taken from Lt. General Sir Francis, *The Meos Rising*, London, 1950
24. Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, *Mewat Ka Safar*, New Delhi, 1988, p.20. (Hereafter quoted as *Safar*)
25. The extent of atrocities may be imagined from the fact that even the officials were not spared by the State Police. See for the details. *The Meos of Mewat*, p.174, *Tarikh Meo Chhatri*, p.507 and *Safar*, p.20.
26. *Safar*, p. 15.
27. Ibid.
28. *Tarikh Meo Chhatri*, p.518, *Safar* p.15 and interview with Master Abdus Salam, General Secretary, Governing Body, Yasin Meo Degree College, Nuh.
29. A file on the Chaudhary Mohammad Yasin Khan, Yasin Meo Degree College, Nuh.
30. *Tarikh Meo Chhatri*, p.518
31. Ibid, p.519
32. *The Tribune*, 20 December, 1947, see also *National Herald*, 21 December. 1947
33. It is fantastic that on the one hand these States were ousting the Meos from their territory but on the other hand the same from Pakistan. See for the detail, *The Tribune*, 13 December, and 23 December, 1947.
34. *National Herald*, 21 December, 1947
35. *Tarikh Meo Chatri*, p.526-528
36. Ibid, p. 403 see also Abdul Hai, p.17. How and why Chaudhary Sahib was arrested is not very clear. different people of the Mewat have given defferent opinion. According to Master Abdus

Salam, Chaudhary Sahib was not having good relations with Sardar Patel. But reality is obscure.

Tarikh Meo Chhatri, p.528

Ibid, p.403; see also Abdul Hai, p.18